

# Sufi Aesthetics

*Beauty, Love, and the Human Form in the  
Writings of Ibn 'Arabi and 'Iraqi*

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# The Amorous Lyric as Mystical Language

## *Union of the Sacred and Profane*

With discussions of vision and beauty now behind us, we proceed to study the pertinence of these phenomena to the amorous lyric, an artistic form favored by Ibn 'Arabi, 'Iraqi, and other Muslim mystics. The phrase "amorous lyric" aims to be an equivalent for certain versified genres used by both saints, lyrical forms concerned with love. Very often, mystics did not create new genres to convey their experiences, working instead within established genres. Such is the case, for example, in Sufi exegetical undertakings, where esoteric commentators employed an existing genre—the *tafsir*—as a medium for their insights.<sup>1</sup> So too did the amorous poem, whether from the Arabic *nasib* or from the Persian *ghazal*, find itself a new medium for the expression of love enhanced by gnostic awareness. In this process, lyric poetry acquired new *meaning*, even if *form* did not always reflect this change.

Needless to say, the poems of Ibn 'Arabi as well as 'Iraqi are shaped by the long poetic traditions that precede them. References to many of the images and motifs of the pre-Islamic *nasib* as well as the 'Udhri tradition of amatory verse can be found in Ibn 'Arabi's *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*. The influences of the *nasib* on Sufi poetry, handled quite ably in Jaroslav Stetkevych's analysis of Ibn al-Farid as well as in the writings of Emil Homerin and (especially in the case of Ibn 'Arabi) Michael Sells, need not be discussed here.<sup>2</sup> Similar to Ibn 'Arabi, following the path laid down by other Persian-speaking Sufi poets before him, 'Iraqi makes use of themes and tropes from the courtly *ghazal* and *qasidah*, from which the poet has ultimately inherited his oft-used image of wine, for example. The concern here, however, is to view these poems not diachronically, as the culmination of various poetic traditions, but rather functionally, as an expression of the vision of love in Sufism. In that regard, juxtaposing the poetry of Ibn 'Arabi, which derives from the Arabic literary tradition, with the poetry of 'Iraqi, which derives mainly from the Persian literary tradition, allows us to push these formative factors temporarily into the background, focusing for now on one feature shared between them: poetry about human beauty with far-reaching spiritual significance. Hence the concern here is almost exclusively for matters of theme and imagery, not poetic form. It is hoped that through this method an important question can then be addressed: Why would amorous verse, often blatantly sensual in its

depictions, become the main artistic medium for the vision that has been hitherto described? That poetry has historically dominated the Islamic arts does not suffice to explain “mystic” affinity for amorous poetry. Rather, there is a homogeneity in aim and experience that renders love poetry such an able medium for the gnostic.

### The Methodology of Ibn ‘Arabi’s Commentary: Hermetic or Aesthetic?

The method of this study has been to consider, up until now, the vision of the mystics at hand and the function of the human form in this vision and, currently, to apply this vision to the poetry shaped by their perceptive experience. Such has been the case because to do otherwise, to engage in mistaken analogies about amorous Sufi poetry, might cause one to misconstrue the poetry of these mystics as somehow distinct from their vision and their claims to gnostic meaning as somehow disingenuous.<sup>3</sup> Such misinterpretations indeed occurred in Muhyi al-Din’s own lifetime, serving as the impetus for his commentary on his *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*. When two of his disciples requested that Ibn ‘Arabi write his commentary, they did so because, in the words of Ibn ‘Arabi, “they had heard one of the jurists of Aleppo deny that this [collection of poems] resulted from divine secrets and that the Shaykh [Ibn ‘Arabi] dissimulates so that [the poetic collection] is ascribed to propriety and religion.”<sup>4</sup>

Of course, the familiarity of these pupils with Ibn ‘Arabi’s work and their offense at these suggestions itself signifies that the original collection of poems without commentary served as an elucidator of spiritual realities. The title of the work, moreover, which literally means “the interpreter of desires,” is perhaps enough of an indication of the collection’s aim. Yet more than simply a defense, the commentary on the *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq* also underscores the visionary dimensions of amorous poetry in general and mystical amorous poetry in particular.

It is understandable that one who approaches the *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq* and its commentary separately, without considering Ibn ‘Arabi’s other discussions of beauty and the human form, would see the commentary as an artificial dressing cloaking the poems. This is the case with Jaroslav Stetkevych’s critique of Ibn ‘Arabi’s commentary, undertaken in his seminal and otherwise excellent *The Zephyrs of Najd*:

A very elaborate example of a symbolic commentary comes from the great mystic and hermetic symbolist Ibn ‘Arabi, who (supposedly under stress but undoubtedly also as his own afterthought and further search for meaning) provided his otherwise poetically undistinguished lyrical collection, appropriately entitled *The Interpreter of Desires*, with a fastidiously detailed quid pro quo “interpretation.” But his commentary appears trapped in its own hermeneutic logic, detached and esoteric. His poetic text would hardly have been served by anything else, however, if the modest amount of mystical substance contained in it was to be salvaged and the general symbolic pretense

maintained. In brief, the result is that the commentary develops largely its own sphere of content, treating the poetry merely as a "point of departure," and the poetry, going its own traditional ways, never quite manages to warrant the flights of the symbolic imagination of the commentary.<sup>5</sup>

Here Stetkevych presents Ibn 'Arabi's commentary as an instance of medieval, mystical hermeneutics, "dense in symbolic texture but restricted in experiential scope," one that relies on etymology and the formalistically "motivated association of concepts to the exclusion of sensory perceptions."<sup>6</sup> Underlying these observations is an assumed distinction between honest sensory perception and abstract and hypothetical mystical terminology. Of course, the refutation of such assumptions lies in the observations and claims of these very mystics, who swore affirmably that their mystical terminology resulted from something witnessed, often through the medium of the physical senses. The outcome was superlatively far from being "restricted in experiential scope." The phrases that Stetkevych uses to describe Ibn 'Arabi's commentary, such as "quid pro quo," "keys," "codes," and, above all, "hermetic," reveals his presumption that Ibn 'Arabi's method revolves around words, words that do not necessarily expand upon the experiential significations of the poem's words. In the coming pages, I will respectfully disagree with Professor Stetkevych's position.

A key difference between Stetkevych's interpretation of Ibn 'Arabi's method and what has been presented throughout this book can be found in his analysis of the victory of the sacred over the profane in Islamic thought. In many ways, Stetkevych's conception of the miracle of the Qur'an belies his conception of Sufi commentaries on poems derived from the *nasib*.<sup>7</sup> Stetkevych is certainly correct that the miracles of Muhammad and Moses subverted and rendered incapable the valued marvels of their own ages, poetry and magic respectively. What Stetkevych fails to mention, or at least consider fully in declaring that with such miracles "the stronger magic wins," is the incomparability of prophetic miracles to their profane counterparts.<sup>8</sup> A miracle is a divine suspension of the probable that often makes use of the external medium of its opponents and bears many of the traits used by them, and yet renders them impotent to respond or recreate it. Similarly the love language of gnostics bears the traits and externalities of profane love but has within it a level of vision and gnosis that would render the profane lover impotent to understand. This is what Ibn 'Arabi intends in commenting on his own poetry. Ibn 'Arabi did not mean for his commentary to be an exclusive and overbearing interpretation of his amorous lyrics, but rather evidence of echoes of meaning in both language and vision. Proof of that lies in the fact that he did not deem a commentary necessary in his first version of the *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*. Proof can also be seen in the observation made by Stetkevych himself that one image is often interpreted in multiple ways in various

instances. Certainly some commentators did abuse the language of Sufi interpretation and employed the device in a line-by-line and word-by-word genre that often forced them to make mystical observations when there might not have been much to say other than repetition. Ibn 'Arabi, however, hopes not to provide keys or codes for his lines of verse but to capture and express their profoundness and even ambiguity.<sup>9</sup>

There is no dearth of poems in the *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq* that illustrate the aesthetic perspective offered by Ibn 'Arabi's commentary. Still, considering the focus of the present study on the human form, it would be most useful to observe a poem with particularly erotic imagery, such as poem number 46 cited below. Here Ibn 'Arabi's nostalgic yearning for the beloved shifts from a potential problem, the longing caused by separation, to an offered solution, the persistence of the beloved in the lover's consciousness:

Between innards and beautiful wide eyes a desire is at war,  
and the heart, from that war, is in a state of perdition.  
A sweet-lipped girl, dark-lipped, honeyed where she is kissed—  
the testimony of the bee is what appears in its white, thick honey.  
Plump are her ankles, darkness over a white moon,  
On her cheek the redness of sunset, a bough on dunes of sand,  
Beautiful, well-adorned, she is not married,  
She laughs showing teeth like brilliant hailstones, white, clean, and sharp.  
When it comes to ignoring, she is serious, but she plays at love frivolously,  
and death is what lies between such seriousness and such play.  
Never does the night blacken except that comes upon its trail  
the breathing-back-to-life of morning, a fact known since olden times.<sup>10</sup>  
And never do the easterly winds pass a lush grassland  
that contains girls with large breasts, virginally bashful, playfully passionate,  
except that, in their light blowing, the breezes cause to bend and to disclose  
the flowers and freshly-cut herbs that are carried by the girls.  
I asked the east wind about them, so that it might inform me,  
it said, "What purpose is there for you to acquire such information?  
In al-Abraqayn and near the Pool of al-Ghimad and near  
the Pool of al-Ghamim, I left the tribe so recently;  
No plot of earth has possessed them." So I said to the wind,  
*Where is the escape*, when the steeds of yearning are in pursuit?<sup>11</sup>  
Far be it! They have no residence except in my consciousness,  
so wherever I am, there is the full moon—expect this!  
Doesn't she rise sun-like only in my fantasy, and set only in  
my heart? Gone is the inauspiciousness of the moringa tree and willow!

There is no cawing for the crow in our alighting places,  
nor can he inflict a wound in the order of togetherness.<sup>12</sup>

This is an expressly sensual poem, one that includes the name of Nizam subtly in the concluding line mentioning the "order of togetherness" (*nizam al-shaml*).<sup>13</sup> Ibn 'Arabi's allusion to a specific female beloved should thwart any false assumptions that the poem or its commentary stem from a system of representations, where the beloved is a transcendent God and the expression of love mere allegory. While one must not deny the sincerity of its author in claiming that these poems result from "divine inrushes and spiritual down-sendings," still his other claim that "with every name I mention in this section [of my collected poems] I allude to her [Nizam], and in every abode over which I weep I intend hers," should remind the reader that the physicality of this poem is as real as it seems.<sup>14</sup> Over and above Ibn 'Arabi's observations about his own poetry, the images within the poem emphasize colors, parts of the human body, and the effect of human beauty on the persona.

Contrary to Stetkevych's suggestion that Ibn 'Arabi's interpretation belongs to "the philological, dichotomy-based tradition of commentary which aims at a construction of meaning through extrapoetic equivalences," Ibn 'Arabi's commentary on this poem illustrates that such observations (from the gnostic perspective) do not stray from the poem itself, nor is it less "poetic" or even "erotic" to make connections between the human beloved and God.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the commentary by its very nature deifies the human form far more than the poem alone. One excellent example of this occurs in Ibn 'Arabi's explanation of the phrase "plump of ankle" (*rayya al-mukhalkhal*), which the poet glosses as "stout of shank" (*mumtali'at al-saq*), allowing him to make reference to a Qur'anic phrase. The part of the Qur'anic verse in question, "the day when the shank is exposed [*yawm yukshaf 'an saq*],"<sup>16</sup> refers idiomatically to the terribleness of Judgment Day, which results from God's overwhelming attributes of might. Here Ibn 'Arabi intends to draw a parallel between the awesome and vanquishing beauty of the beloved and the awesomeness of God. Elsewhere Ibn 'Arabi has clarified that beauty itself can possess might and dominance, which in the context of God's attributes Ibn 'Arabi calls the "majesty of beauty" (*jalal al-jamal*).<sup>17</sup> By applying this to the human beloved, the poet comments on the spiritual implications of human beauty, a beauty comprehensive enough that it relays even the overpowering attributes of God. What Ibn 'Arabi conveys to his readers is an accurate description of the effects of human beauty, one with which any sensitive lover would sympathize. The plump ankle of the beloved is not here a code or metaphorical allusion to God's awesomeness. Rather, its sway on the lover results from God's awesomeness made manifest in the natural world.

One sees Ibn 'Arabi's ability to conjure up the unity of the sensual and supersensory in his commentary on the poem's personification of the wind. The wind

describes its passing over the travelers as having occurred "from proximity" (*'an kathab*), which may be taken to mean "recently." According to Ibn 'Arabi this phrase illustrates the Prophet Muhammad's fondness for rain because it is "recent from its Lord" (*hadith 'ahd bi-rabbihi*), in the hadith quoted earlier.<sup>18</sup> More than simply commenting on his poem, Ibn 'Arabi here makes an observation concerning the hadith itself and thus interprets the Prophet's actions (allowing the rain to fall upon him) as resulting from being stirred by a certain kind of beauty. Rain, young faces, and a fresh vernal breeze all carry the aura of recent creation, and their beauty derives from a beaming sense of new life. The smells and sights of creation play an important role in the aesthetic values of Ibn 'Arabi and serve to conjoin his admiration for the female (and young male) human form to the divine source of all things. It also comments powerfully on the reason behind the wind's effect on lovers.

Yet perhaps the finest illustration of the intentional ambiguity between human and divine beloved in this poem occurs in its final lines. The poem indicates in its two penultimate double lines that the beloved can no longer be separated from the lover because she persists in his consciousness or mind (*khaladi*); this accords with the definition of *shahid* that has been seen, a continuing trace that remains in the gnostic's heart and that he enjoys witnessing in the world exterior. The connection between a persistently imagined beloved and the remnants of witnessing within the heart appear in Ibn 'Arabi's commentary on the image of the crow, which no longer "has the influence to bring disunion to togetherness, since the realities show us that there is no veil after self-disclosure and no erasure after inscription upon the heart."<sup>19</sup> The projection of the heart's *shahid* onto the world of forms is a point evident in the poem itself, not wanting elucidation for those aware of Ibn 'Arabi's vision, but still emphasized in the commentary. Indeed, one version of the poem more directly refers to the *shahid*, on account of a variant reading of the phrase "they have no residence except in my consciousness" (*maghnan siwa khaladi*), which in the alternate version reads "they have no *meaning* except in my consciousness" (*ma'nan siwa khaladi*). Either word points to the true location of the beloved *shahid*, namely, the gnostic heart, an observation that Ibn 'Arabi clarifies: "In saying, *Far be it! They have no meaning* . . . , the poet intends the Prophet's saying (blessings and peace be upon him), which he narrates from his Lord: 'My earth and My heaven do not contain Me, but the heart of my believing slave contains Me.' Therefore, it [the heart] is a location for God's gnosis and a place for the divine self-disclosure."<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the heart might be considered the setting of this poem, a setting the expansiveness of which appears most vividly in the poet's commentary.

The perceptive centrality of the heart can be seen in Ibn 'Arabi's discerning various levels of divine manifestation in the poem's reference to sunrise and sunset. Sunrise alludes to forms in the imaginal realm (*'alam al-tamaththul*). Sunset alludes to a comprehensive or all-containing realm (*al-sa'ah allati dhakarnaha*): the human

heart, which achieves the gnosis of God. This is a significant distinction. While this sensual poem on the surface seems to acknowledge one realm of existence, that of the natural world and the physical beauty within it, Ibn 'Arabi's commentary considers the spiritual, imaginal, and natural realms and adds to it the realm of the human heart, which contains all else. Earlier in his analysis of this poem, Ibn 'Arabi comments that "the only veil for the hearts of the gnostics impeding their perception of the Highest Panoramas [*al-manazir al-'ula*] is the natural realm [*al-'alam al-tabi'i*]." The term "Highest Panoramas" is, to my knowledge, specific to Ibn 'Arabi's commentary on the *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*, not found or at least not commonly used in either his *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyah* or his *Fusus al-Hikam*. The Highest Panoramas seem to correspond to God's attributes neither in their function as sources for the names of God nor in their function as universals, but in their function as loci of witnessing for the heart. In other words, whereas the universals (*al-umur al-kulliyah*) represent God's attributes insofar as they are applied to all things (for example, strength in its multiple manifestations of all that which we would deem "strong"), the Highest Panoramas indicate the attributes when seen through a vision of reversion, a looking back from loci of manifestation to their sources.<sup>21</sup> While veiled for the mystic, the purely supersensory Highest Panoramas still act as a source of vision for these gnostics and of existence for all things (since things exist only through gazing upon the Panoramas, even if behind a veil). Because of the veiling quality of the natural world there is no perceived discrepancy or conflict for the gnostic between the contradictions and adulterations of the natural realm (literally, the "realm of mixed components and permeation," *'alam al-akhlat wa-l-tadakhul*) and the Highest Panoramas. In other words, the gnostic's vision perceives harmony. The heart, however, senses a discrepancy and agonizes because of it.

Hence the heart is, as the poem's opening lines indicate, in a state of war because of its own ontological poverty contrasted with the intimations of perfection it senses. Clearly the natural world serves as a *necessary* veil, one that not only allows the gnostic to experience a vision of unity but also actually increases his longing. The separation between beloved and lover, perceived by the heart, excites the sense of yearning, passion, and aspiration to union. The veil allows for the longing to *unveil*. This is true of the veil that exists between the Highest Panoramas and the heart that discerns the limits of the natural world. It is also true, however, for the distance that separates the poet from his beloved, allowing him to see her and desire her. Her eyes provoke a feeling of urgency and pain inside him, in his "innards" (*al-hashha*). Just as each realm of manifestation and existence necessarily affects that which it subsumes, so too does the beloved's exterior (her eyes) affect the poet's interior (his entrails). One sees then that there is nothing artificial about Ibn 'Arabi's reading. Quite to the contrary, the interpretation he offers highlights gnostic realizations about human-to-human love.



Lastly, aside from furthering the awareness of profundity in the amorous lyric and in the Sufi amorous lyric, and in addition to warding off misunderstanding, Ibn 'Arabi's commentary also represents the significance of amorous poetry for the spiritual path and the ability of amorous poetry to exteriorize the sense of love in mystical experience. It is likely that one reason for the emphasis on teaching and commenting on such poetry in the Akbari school was this very effect. In justifying his commentary, Ibn 'Arabi states, "I allude in these [pages of commentary and poetry] to lordly gnostic learning, divine lights, spiritual secrets, noetic sciences, and admonitions based on the Islamic tradition; I rendered the expression of all this in the language of the amorous lyric [*ghazal*] and playfully erotic poetic depictions [*al-tashbib*], because souls fall passionately in love with such expressions."<sup>22</sup> Here Ibn 'Arabi is not reducing his poetry to allegory or a representative system but is justifying the need for amorous poetry among Sufis. Why do souls fall passionately in love with expressions of human-to-human love? Because such is a vehicle for recognizing human-divine love, in much the same way that human beauty is a vehicle for witnessing divine beauty. In this regard, the *Tarjuman's* commentary serves as an important inducer of *tashbih*/similitude for the gnostics. It localizes or humanizes lofty spiritual concepts, so that one can actually begin to *love* something as supersensory as the Highest Panoramas or further one's love of the sublime. The language of the commentary, therefore, in drawing connections between the language of contemplative Sufism and amorous poetry, brings into the realm of vision and love that which might still be abstract for the novice wayfarer. For the more advanced spiritual wayfarer, the sense of sympathetic acknowledgment aroused in hearing these connections is central to perceiving the beauty of the poem and the masterfulness of the commentary.

Far from being a quid pro quo or hermetic analysis, Ibn 'Arabi's manner of interpretation assumes that the poem itself is a manifestation of the experience of beauty, subject to the very grades and realms of existence possessed by the human form. Conjoining the human beloved and the divine in forms is the gnostic's experience of beauty. In other words, the gnostic sees the human form and therein the divine self-disclosures—his experience brings the two together, or at the very least, recognizes their unity. His expression of that experience in words is what remains of the meeting place or *barzakh* between two levels of existence: form and meaning, spirit and matter, or human beauty and the divine presence. The gnostic's words do more than simply capture the human beloved or her effects; they do so through the medium of his enlightened experience. Thus the words of the poem become the form that captures meaning. This artistic form, unlike the human form, is shaped solely by the lover-perceiver. Meaning has now taken two forms, the human beloved and the recorded experience of that beloved; the first is determined by existence, the second is determined by the gnostic's experience of existence. The delight in poetry

derives from its ability to recreate this meaningful form of recorded experience in the hearts of those exposed to it. Ibn 'Arabi's commentary, while never directly propounding such significance to poetry, inherently elevates the recorded poetic experience of love to a level of signification far beyond mere emotion or mere words. Only that which captures meaning deserves the sort of analysis that Ibn 'Arabi offers.

### Sacred-Profane Ambiguity: An Aesthetic Value

In his doctoral dissertation, "The Poems of Fakhr al-Din 'Iraqi," Julian Baldick undertakes to divide the poems from 'Iraqi's *diwan* into a number of categories, including those that are "Sufi," those that have "no overt Sufi content" and thus "could be either sacred or profane," those which "show the influence of Ibn 'Arabi," and those "in which there is inconclusive evidence for the influence of Ibn 'Arabi," among others. While I would not normally subject an unpublished dissertation to critical scrutiny, Baldick's is an important undertaking, both in its capacity as an accomplished historical study and as one of the few existing English resources on 'Iraqi.

Considering Baldick's interest in placing 'Iraqi's poems in a historical context, the attempt to categorize them in such a manner would make sense, if, that is, 'Iraqi's poems were less ambiguous. Baldick himself seems to recognize the shortcomings in this approach in commenting that "given the nature of the material, such rules may evoke some derision."<sup>23</sup> While in some instances Baldick's approach does successfully place the poetry in a historical context useful for understanding the poet's frame of reference, there remain two major flaws in Baldick's very premise, a premise that anticipates distinctions between sacred and profane, and Akbari and non-Akbari Sufi poetry: "Thus we insist that if a poem has no overtly Sufi element in it then it may well be considered profane: given the long-standing tradition of the *ghazal* before 'Iraqi, the poet is to be seen as making contributions to an established genre rather than having a clearly defined addressee, human or divine. If the overtly Sufi content of a poem exceeds two lines (by line we mean a *bayt* not a *misra'*, which we call a half-line), then it is to be classified as Sufi; if the amount is two lines only, then it can be said to have 'some' Sufi content; if it is less, it can be said to have a little. Further subdivisions are made according to theme: these categories are naturally arbitrary, and poems could easily be moved from one to another."<sup>24</sup> As seen in Baldick's last sentence, the ambiguities in 'Iraqi's poetry have brought the literary historian to hesitate in ratifying the categories he has created. Perhaps more problematic than the exceptions to the rules Baldick establishes is the quantifying of Sufi content. Even one hemistich indicating gnostic insight comments on the entirety of the poem. Moreover, as seen in Ibn 'Arabi's case, even poems that lack any explicitly mystic dimensions are often viewed as a homogeneous output of mystical experience.

A second problem with Baldick's divisions is the assumption that Ibn 'Arabi's teachings will necessarily show themselves as somehow different from the declarations of previous Sufis. With regard to the Akbari element in 'Iraqi's poems, Baldick remarks that such influence is "clearly evident in some poems, and possibly in others," advising his readers to consult a source on Ibn 'Arabi's thought.<sup>25</sup> Of course, here the main complication is that poetry and prose inspired by the teachings of Ibn 'Arabi does not necessarily need to be inundated with Akbari terms or concepts. On the surface, the *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*—its commentary aside—lacks signature Akbari vocabulary. Moreover, even the *Lama'at*, which is perhaps 'Iraqi's most conspicuously Akbari work, manages to make reference to Akbari teachings in a manner at times so subtle, that Hamid ibn Fadlullah Jamali (d. 942/1536) considered the text to be inspired by the Suhrawardi Sadr al-Din 'Arif (d. 684/1286), the son and successor of Baha' al-Din Zakariya (d. 661/1262), and not the Akbari Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi.<sup>26</sup> Lastly, even non-Akbari Sufi poets, such as Ibn al-Farid, or poets that were not Sufi at all or even spiritually inclined, such as Harun al-Rashid, were considered to have composed suitable material for Akbari commentary. This reminds us that, in the arena of poetry and love, Ibn 'Arabi did not present observations that demanded the awareness of poets, but rather a commentary on what every lover knows about love, whether consciously or unconsciously.

Let us reconsider, however, Baldick's mention of poems that have merely one double line of explicit Sufi reference. Baldick notes that it is common in the poetry of 'Iraqi for the poet to use the *takhallus* (the concluding double line of the poem in which the poet's pen name is often mentioned) to "introduce, at the end of a poem, which up to now could have been sacred or profane, a Sufi theme."<sup>27</sup> This accurate observation tells us much about the place of erotic imagery in the gnostic vision of 'Iraqi. A sudden introduction of mystical language or mystical concerns does not indicate that the poet has contorted or forced a sacred interpretation of what is in actually profane poetry. Nor does it imply that the mystical double line included differs in any meaningful way from the purely profane verse surrounding it. To the contrary, the lack of candidly sacred language can betray an assumption on the poet's part that there is no real difference between profane and sacred themes; therefore there is no need to be explicitly "Sufi." (If, moreover, these lines were additions made to a collection of profane poems after the poet's conversion to the Sufi path, then his discretion in adding so little and leaving so many poems unchanged would illustrate the suitability of profane poetry to mystical meaning.) Thus one should be aware that the mystical significance of the images in the entirety of an erotic poem can be indicated by a mere double line or hemistich, or need not be indicated directly at all.

One can see the manner in which 'Iraqi *suggests* sacred meaning, as opposed to directly stating it, in a poem that mainly concerns the beloved's enchantingly beautiful hair:

From behind the veil came the wine-server, with a goblet in hand;  
 he not only rent our veil—he also smashed our repentance.  
 He displayed a beautiful face; we all went into a frenzy.  
 Once nothing remained of us, he came, sitting on our laps.  
 His tress loosened its knot, the fetter was lifted from our hearts,  
 My soul detached its heart from the world and tied it to his hair-tip.  
 In the snare that is his hair-tip we all remained bewildered,  
 and from the cup of wine that is his ruby lips, we all became besotted.  
 The heart lost its self-control, once it clasped one of his ringlets—  
 He causes all that he can reach to drown in stupefaction.  
 Once his chain-like ringlets fettered the bewildered heart,  
 it became freed from the world and rescued itself from existence.  
 The heart was lost to his hair-tip; I sought [it] back from the ringlet;  
 his lip said: “Be happy that it has now adhered to us!”  
 The heart sat gleefully with the friend, since it had forsaken soul:  
 it conjoined soul with beloved and cosmos, having cut off both the worlds.  
 From his teasing glance and his face, sometimes I’m drunk and sometimes sober,  
 and from his ringlet and his lip, sometimes I don’t exist, and sometimes I do.  
 There used to be a time when, wishing to utter something of the secrets,  
 I would become afraid of others and would speak allusively.<sup>28</sup>

In some respects, the references in this poem to the beloved’s being (*hasti-i ‘u*), to an attraction that affects the entire cosmos, to cutting off from both worlds, and to an unnamed plurality of lovers seems to ensure that the beloved here is divine. Yet while one might consider this poem (and numerous others like it in ‘Iraqi’s *diwan*) manifestly mystical in its description of a godly beloved, nevertheless, deified images of the beloved can also serve as effective hyperbole, so that ambiguity is maintained. This poem seems even more ambiguous when juxtaposed with ‘Iraqi’s other poems, many of which use these same images to describe a beloved seemingly disengaged from any divine predications. ‘Iraqi is also careful to avoid hints of transcendence in these descriptions. In other words, the intended in this poem might be a deified human beloved, or perhaps the divine subjected to the language of *tashbih*/similitude, or—most likely of all—the beloved in its most comprehensive sense, which is at once the human *shahid* and the Source of all beauty.

In accordance with Baldick’s observation, the final double line seems to clarify that its poet is indeed a gnostic, or at least someone privileged with esoteric knowledge of the beloved. The persona no longer represses secrets, because his lack of concern for reputation means that he no longer fears the scrutiny of outsiders. To some extent this secret seems to be that the beloved *is* divine—which is only a perilous statement if the poem signifies a human (or at least excessively humanlike) beloved.

The power of these poems lies in the realization that, once one labels it a celebration of the sacred, the high degree of similitude or immanence in it seems almost blasphemous. On the other hand, once one labels it a celebration of the profane, the deified and clearly mystical images in it render such love for the human form almost blasphemous.

Another important theme in the poem above is that the heart has a will of its own, not subject to the practical considerations of the persona. The beloved does with the heart what he wills, and the persona must succumb. Very often in the poems of Fakhr al-Din, concern for the heart and its states pervades. This focus on the beloved's effects on the heart allows the poet to maintain an indeterminate tone, one that seems to humanize the divine and deify the human simultaneously:

Today my heart can hold nothing but the friend.  
 It is constricted for that reason: no others can be held within.  
 In my flooded eyes but for the friend no one appears,  
 and no one but the friend is in this enduring heart of mine.  
 Nevertheless, I am gleeful, that in this my narrow heart  
 grief can find no cure—rehabilitation is not an option.  
 If ever this soul in my body should be without the friend,  
 it is afflicted to the utmost. It cannot bear this burden.  
 Where is the cup of wine of love for him, so that I can get drunk? Because  
 in the feast of union with him, no one sober can be found.  
 Where are his entrapping hair-tips to snag away this heart?  
 For no one remains with-heart within the tangles of his hair-locks.  
 Once love-for-him invades, the soul vacates its cell,  
 Once such love makes its home there, dwellers cannot be found.  
 This drop of blood, after being colored by his ruby lips,  
 from glee—like the pomegranate—within the skin can't be contained.  
 I'm not bothered by the hostile words of enemies because  
 there are no troubles in this heart for me, when I'm with him.  
 I took gifts for the heart: soul, body, religion, reason.  
 The heart said, "Be gone! For here is empty of all four.  
 If you really want to enter, put *'Iraqi* aside  
 for in the sanctuary of souls, the infidel's belt cannot exist."<sup>29</sup>

Baldick includes this poem in the category of "Sufi *ghazals*, love poems," probably on the basis of the last two double lines.<sup>30</sup> Of course, if one ignores these concluding lines, the poem becomes completely ambiguous. Even with the final lines in consideration, it would not be farfetched to require that a true lover in the profane sense should abandon "soul, body, religion, reason" for the sake of his beloved. The lover, in both sacred and profane contexts, must abandon all. It is noteworthy,

however, that the persona must negotiate not with the beloved but with his own heart. Again 'Iraqi depicts the heart absorbed with the beloved, while the persona watches helplessly from a distance. Among the things that the persona must abandon is the soul. In this poem and elsewhere, 'Iraqi describes the soul (*jan*) as if it were an encumbrance, not only in the poem's closing lines but also in describing the soul's escape once love invades. In an alternate version of this poem, this theme is emphasized in the penultimate double line: "My soul struck the heart's door, it [the heart said], 'Leave, for this instant, / with the friend, in this secluded cell, there's no room for [other] convent-dwellers.'"<sup>31</sup> Thus, considering the undesirable quality of *jan*, it might be better to look upon the word as "life," or even "existence." The poet must abandon his own existence for the sake of the beloved. Is this mystical experience? Yes, but not strictly so. It is an experience common to all lovers who lose themselves in an intensity of desire and must negotiate with their own recalcitrant hearts. Thus much of what renders this a successful poem is the careful use of the language of lovers, as opposed to the language of Sufi experience. Even if mystical or religious themes are stated explicitly, a sense of subtlety and obscurity still surrounds them. If the sacred vocabulary of Sufism were presented in too forthright a manner, then the descriptions of the beloved and his effects would seem a mere poetic device or allegorical trope. Rather, by maintaining ambiguity, 'Iraqi captures the genuineness of this experience for all lovers.

### A Glance at Persian Sufi Glossaries

Of course, an important treatise attributed to 'Iraqi might seem to counteract the desired ambiguity discussed hitherto. In the *Istilahat-i Sufiyah*, an author identified as 'Iraqi offers neat equivalents for many of the terms common to sensually amorous poetry. Here, however, along with the matter of dubious authorship, the matter of genre must be carefully considered. The *ghazal* is a mode of ambiguity. The commentary or the glossary can be a mode of disambiguation, but it is one not intended to supersede or nullify the ambiguity that exists in poetry. Rather, it simply exists to verify the spiritual or sacred dimension of these images.

Moreover, while Sharaf al-Din Tabrizi's glossary, *Rashf al-Alhaz fi Kashf al-Alfaz*, probably served as the source for the less cohesive collection attributed to 'Iraqi, a very brief consideration of these glossaries will further illustrate the integral relationship that Sufis discerned between the externality of words and the resonating strata of beauty within them. Tabrizi's response to the use of erotic and vinous terms in the Persian poetic tradition is extremely sensitive to the relationship between meaning and form, sensitive enough that one definitely could imagine 'Iraqi as the text's author, even if some definitions do not correspond to usage in the poetry of 'Iraqi.<sup>32</sup> In fact, Tabrizi shows an almost tangible allegiance to the worldview presented throughout this book, seen in his observation that "the World of Meanings cannot

be perceived except in the clothing of form."<sup>33</sup> The supersensory nature of meaning demands that it assumes the forms of either actions or words that can be grasped in sensory or rational fashion.<sup>34</sup> Yet such words, especially those describing the human body, are not merely tools for understanding, since, as Tabrizi notes, a prophetic hadith verifies that *God has created Adam according to his form*.<sup>35</sup> "Once the intoxicated nightingales and peacocks of A-last beheld this [human] form, and once they began chirping melodiously, they brought original poetic order to the words 'lock of hair' [zulf] and 'mole' [khal], made each a locus of manifestation for profound meaning, and caused realities and subtleties to appear in such a manner."<sup>36</sup>

Were one to trace these words back to their ontological origins, in other words, one would find that words indicating human beauty have their origins in a cosmic appreciation of the divine-human resemblance. Thus the essential meaning of such words has a profundity that transcends the external meaning observed by most. Tabrizi's theory that the etymological origins of words describing human beauty stems from the admiration of angels (whom he describes poetically as nightingales and peacocks) for the divinely mirroring human form closely parallels a statement made more candidly by Mahmud Shabistari (d. ca. 740/1339–40) in his *Gulshan-i Raz* (Flower-garden of Secrets): "According to me, these terms [*alfaz*] that undergo esoteric interpretation / were established with those meanings from the very outset. / Applying them specifically to sensory things is the custom of the common. / How would a commoner comprehend what that [original] meaning is?"<sup>37</sup> Shabistari posits that sensual terms became applied exclusively to human features through a process of materialization, implying that the lexical origins of words such as "lip" and "mole" are immaterial. His interest in poetic terms yet again indicates that the supersensory significance of words relating to the human form and wine drinking became an important matter in the Akbari tradition, as did the extraction of sublime meaning from those words through commentaries and Sufi glossaries.

While one might assume that such cosmological etymologies strip words of any nonsacred significance, the brilliance of the glossary (both that attributed to 'Iraqi as well as the parallel glossary written by Tabrizi) lies in accurately portraying the language of beloveds, lovers, and love in its most sublime human context, namely, the gnostic-divine relationship, without abrogating the profane. To give one example, the glossaries define "comeliness" (*husn*) and "beauty" (*jamal*) in a manner that differentiates between essential beauty (*husn*) and beauty realized as instances of belovedness (*jamal*). Comeliness is "what they call the collection of all perfections in one essence, and this belongs only to the Real."<sup>38</sup> Such perfections belong to the Real, but are borrowed by others; in its fullest and original sense comeliness applies only to the divine essence. Beauty is "what they call the making manifest of the beloved's perfections through the extreme longing and seeking of the lover."<sup>39</sup> In other words, while comeliness is an absolute and abstract trait, beauty results from

the *application* of comeliness to a relationship between lover and beloved. Beauty is comeliness observed and admired. Also, one might notice that in defining *husn*, which is an essential trait, the author specifies the Real. In contrast, when defining *jamal*, which can be applied to existents, the author defines it as pertaining to the “lover” and “beloved,” more general terms applicable to any two entities, include humans loving other humans. Such precision validates all grades of beauty while still asserting the ongoing divine generation of that beauty.

### Love Poetry as a Model for Gnosis

When Ibn ‘Arabi refers to famous sets of lovers from Arabic poetry, he often does so with great respect and even admiration, going so far as to label the peak of gnosis—the culmination of witnessing and ecstasy—as the “Religion of Love,” whose heroes are Bishr, Hind, Qays, Layla, Kuthayyir, ‘Azzah, and all those who loved or were loved with all their being.<sup>40</sup> In celebrating these figures, Muhyi al-Din not only wishes to describe the desire and longing aroused for the mystic in witnessing but also aims to show the universality of love and its successive degrees. Those whose love is aimed at a human beloved undergo an experience parallel to gnostic love, an experience in which the lover derives pleasure and proximity from witnessing. Moreover, the uninitiated lover has actually come to know affection for one particular divine self-disclosure and one particular divine name, whether that name belong to the mistress “Layla” or to the idol “al-‘Uzza.”<sup>41</sup> The central difference is that, while the lovers in Arabic poetry love a particular instance of beauty, the gnostics love the Source of beauty. Lovers of human beloveds witness beauty in one particular form, while the gnostic witnesses the perfection behind all forms, the one who takes the entire cosmos as his form and yet still cannot be captured by form. Ibn ‘Arabi clarifies this point when commenting on a couplet in one of his most famous poems from the *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*:

“Ours is a model in Hind’s lover Bishr and in their counterparts / and in Qays and Layla, and in Mayya and Ghaylan.”

The poet mentions lovers of the created world—those enraptured by desirous love for girls secluded in forms—from among those Arabs enslaved by love. By “their counterparts” (*ukhtiha*), he means Jamil ibn Ma‘mar and Buthaynah, Bayad and Riyad, [Qays] ibn al-Dharih and Lubna, and others like them. He uses the word “love” (*al-hubb*) because that which is love for us and for them is one reality, except that they have desirous love for the beloved in the created world while we have desirous love for the Source. Otherwise, the conditions, concomitant traits, and mediate causes are one. We can take these lovers as a model, for God the Exalted captivated them and afflicted them with love for humans like themselves only in order to make them



proofs over anyone who claims to have love for him and yet fails to love with the same passionate intensity that these lovers had. For love had taken away their sense of reason and annihilated them from themselves on account of their witnessing *shahids* of their beloveds in their imagination. Thus, more fitting [than a human beloved] for the one who makes claims to love is the One who is "his hearing and seeing," He who outdoes his [i.e., the human lover's] drawing near by drawing near to him double-fold.<sup>42</sup>

The lovers of Arabic amorous poetry are superb models (*uswah*) on account of the intensity of their devotion and the self-annihilation which they undergo. Strictly in terms of sentiment, the experience of all-consuming natural love and gnostic love have enough in common to be considered one reality. Their symptoms do not merely parallel the effect of love for God on the gnostic, but rather, the utter self-resignation of these lovers stands as a paradigm for anyone who claims to love God.

Of course, while the *manner* of love practiced by these lovers is commendable, the *object* of their love is not fully and correctly perceived. Since gnostics know that the Real is the Source of beauty and hence the conclusive object of love, their rank as lovers outstrips all others. This is no minor point. Ibn 'Arabi emphasizes that while every lover ultimately loves the Real, only the gnostics are aware of this fact. While at times he might seem to praise all lovers, he also expresses a disparaging view of those who love created things. In his chapter on love in *al-Futuhat*, Ibn 'Arabi mentions that while the lover "does not love anyone except for his Creator," lovers of created objects are "veiled from him the Exalted through the love of Zaynab, Su'ad, Hind, Layla, this lower world, the dirham, status, and every beloved in this world."<sup>43</sup> Note that here Ibn 'Arabi includes objects of love that in classical Sufi texts are objects of contempt against which one must guard oneself: status (*al-jah*), wealth (*al-dirham*), and the most blameworthy of all, the lower world itself (*al-dunya*). Poets have wasted their words on created existents while unaware, but the gnostics "do not hear a poem, or a riddle, or a panegyric, or an amorous *ghazal*, except that in it is he who is behind the veil of forms."<sup>44</sup> Thus the importance difference between gnostic and profane lovers is awareness and the intensity that results from awareness:

To [comprehend] what we mention, is it not fitting to consider Qays al-Majnun in his love for Layla, how it annihilated him from himself? Likewise we consider the people of bewildering love [*walah*] and the lovers to be greater in terms of pleasure and mightier in terms of their love for God than those who love members of their own [human] species. The divine form in the servant is more complete in terms of resemblance than the resemblance within species, [and love occurs between entities sharing a resemblance of form]. It is not in the capability of someone from your species to be your hearing and sight. Rather, his [or her] ultimate limit is to be your *heard* and

your *perceived*—in the passive sense. When the servant perceives through a truth that is more complete, then his pleasure is greater, his desire mightier. This is befitting to be the desire of the People of God.<sup>45</sup>

Such observations concerning the universality and degrees of love have important repercussions in gnostic applications of poetry. First, sincerity and proficiency in declaring the experience of love becomes a standard by which poetic expression is considered successful. A successful poem is one that is able to recreate best the experience known and shared by all gnostic lovers, indeed by all lovers, since the experience of love is in fact one. It matters little if this lover is a gnostic or not, in fact, because of the unity of all love. The poet must merely be a true lover, able to capture the lovability (i.e., beauty) of his beloved and its effect on himself; this representational form (the poem), if effective, will then induce a parallel experience in its audience. Those with gnostic insight will recognize the spiritual significance of the recorded experience at hand and the corresponding beloved. It is because of this unity of love that both Ibn 'Arabi and 'Iraqi praise with such esteem lovers from the profane poetic tradition. Numerous examples of admiration for lovers from the profane poetic tradition, mentioned in the writings of Ibn 'Arabi, have been cited. While not often, 'Iraqi too refers to lovers from the profane tradition; some occasions in the *Lama'at* where 'Iraqi mentions Layla and Majnun have been cited. Similarly, in a *tarji'band* attributed to 'Iraqi, the names of famous lovers underscore the severity of the poet-persona's love:

The bird that is my soul has broken inside—  
in the air of love for you it takes to flight:  
Farhad's passionate love and the face of Shirin,  
Mahmud's head and the dirt of the feet of Ayaz.<sup>46</sup>

The universal language of love allows mystics in the Akbari tradition (and in other traditions sympathetic to this notion of love) to apply their method of interpretation to any earnest love poem. One example mentioned earlier is Harun al-Rashid's lines written for his singing slave girls, interpreted with gnostic dimensions by Ibn 'Arabi. In the *Lama'at*, 'Iraqi applies two double lines from the Saljuq panegyrist Awhad al-Din Muhammad Anwari (d. ca. 582/1186) to gnostic experience:

Those who gaze deeply at your beautiful face,  
when they view it acutely from various angles,  
see in your face the faces of themselves:  
The differences in depictions arise from this.<sup>47</sup>

Clearly—for 'Iraqi—the court poet Anwari's perceptivity and insight into the effects of a beautiful beloved, even in the profane sense, have given his lines mystical veracity. Indeed, in this case, the resemblance of such verse to that of the mystics

is striking but easily explained. As is evident from the *ghazal* as a whole, Anwari, in exaggerating the effects of his human beloved, has deified his object of admiration. By elevating his beloved to an ambiguously human-divine status, he has rendered his profane poem suitable for gnostic contemplation. This ontologically justified universality of love so expands the domain of poetic commentary that, in a paper presented to an English-speaking audience on beauty, love, and poetic expression in Persian Sufi poetry, for example, one contemporary Iranian critic refers as easily to the sonnets of William Shakespeare as to the poetry of Jami, Rumi, or Hafiz.<sup>48</sup>

### Language Unbounded by Reason: Poetry as a Contradictive Medium

In considering poetry, especially amorous poetry, as a medium of expression for the vision of the gnostic, it is now necessary to return to some declarations made by Ibn 'Arabi in chapter 178 of *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyah*, particularly those concerning the illogical and irrational nature of love: "If I cannot put him in a form, then I know not whom my soul loves / and his being placed in forms cannot be proven logically."<sup>49</sup> Regarding the matter of love and witnessing, Ibn 'Arabi recognizes the inevitability of perplexity for the gnostic, who sees and adores that which is contrary to reason: God in forms. To some extent, Ibn 'Arabi and those gnostics who referred to this experience and its effects seemed to be aware of the contrast between their descriptions and that which had been asserted in traditional Islamic theology and philosophy. According to Islamic logicians, contradictories cannot both be true, so that a syllogistic argument is easily refuted if a "combination of contradictories" (*ijtima' al-naqidayn*) occurs in it. Ibn 'Arabi alludes to the supralogical and contradictory experience of the gnostic lover, in fact of the lover more generally, in his chapter on love, among other instances:<sup>50</sup> "Love's necessary concomitants dress me in its ipseity / with the dress of contradictories [*naqidayn*], like one present and mentally absent."<sup>51</sup> While contradictories are not at all the same as opposites, for Ibn 'Arabi, the meeting of opposites characterizes the lover's contradictory experience, one that results from his unique position in the cosmos:

Among the properties of love [*al-mahabbah*] is that the lover, in his loving, combines opposites, in order to resolve his having been created in a form, on the one hand, with that which he possesses of freewill, on the other. This difference [of form versus will] is that which lies between natural love and spiritual love, which the human being alone combines. Quadrupeds love but, unlike the human, do not combine opposites. The human combines opposites in his act of loving only because he has been created according to his [that is, God's] form, who described himself through opposites in saying, *He is the First and the Last, the Outer and the Inner*.<sup>52</sup> Love combines opposites in this manner: Among the necessary attributes of love is union with the beloved. Also, however, among the necessary attributes of love is that the

lover loves that which the beloved loves, and the beloved loves separation. If the lover loves separation, then he has acted against the dictates of love, for indeed love seeks union. Yet, if the lover loves union, he has also acted against the dictates of love, for indeed the lover loves that which the beloved loves and does not act [on his own]. Hence the lover is thwarted [*mahjuj*] in every case. The ultimate of combining these two opposites is to love the beloved's love of separation, not separation itself, and also to love union.<sup>53</sup>

The lover is in a baffling situation in terms of what he wills. Like all creatures of form, especially in the natural realm, he is subject to desires. Conversely his spiritual qualities bestow him with a cognizant will of his own, so that he can choose to obey his desires or the will of his beloved. No longer is will something that pertains only to himself: He must now choose to sacrifice his will for the will of the beloved, even when the beloved has willed that which is contrary to love itself, that is, separation. The lover is faced with a contradiction.

Of course, the major contradiction the lover faces is one that has been discussed: the vision of God in forms, which contradicts reason itself. Elsewhere the relationship between love and *tashbih* was mentioned; it will be recalled, for example, that while rational proofs serve the central purpose of establishing the divine transcendence, "when the divine reports came, in the languages of religious law, telling us that he *is* such-and-such and *is* such-and-such, in matters the outer senses of which contradict rational proofs, we loved him for the sake of these positive attributes."<sup>54</sup> In other words, the language of *tashbih* arouses love in spite of the limits of reason, which opposes it. Thus, considering the contradictions and combination of opposites faced by the lover, the most accurate word that describes his situation is perplexity (*al-hayrah*). Herein lies the importance of poetry, especially amorous poetry that can portray perplexity and a crisis in self-will, without the burdens of logic and continuity found in discursive prose. This is one reason that imaginative and emotive poetry stands as the language of all lovers, whether gnostic or otherwise.

The poems in Ibn 'Arabi's *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq* not only often describe the separation and consequent longing so common to the Arabic *nasib* but also, more generally, convey a sense of perplexity central to the experience of love:

If only I knew whether they were cognizant  
of the heart that remains within their possession.  
And my heart—if it could somehow just apprehend  
the mountain-pass which they traversed.  
Do you suppose they made it safely?  
Or do you suppose that they have perished?  
The lords of love-longing [*al-hawa*] are perplexed  
in love-longing and are near inescapably entangled.<sup>55</sup>

On its own, without considering the commentary, this poem depicts a caravan departed, having taken with it the heart of an enamored lover. In futility he wonders about the journey of his beloved's caravan, the perils that they have faced, and their arrival. It ends with a statement on the hopeless condition of the lover, who must tolerate separation and nescience. Applying to it Ibn 'Arabi's commentary adds to this poem not only a gnostic dimension but also a dimension of spiritual-romantic narrative. According to Ibn 'Arabi, while he circumambulated the Ka'bah reciting these lines, he felt upon his back the strike of a hand with a "palm softer than silk."<sup>56</sup> His attention turned suddenly to a girl "from among the girls of Rum," more comely of face, sweeter of speech, more able in interpretation, and more endowed with gnosis and beauty than all the people of her time. She demands that he read the poem back to her, and she takes him to task for complications of spiritual significance that she has already discerned in each line. As she commands him to read every next line, she disputes each time the poet's observations and chides him. Interestingly Ibn 'Arabi does not reject her critique, at least not directly, offering instead only praise for her perfect insight and thereupon offering his own commentary. This narrative is here mentioned because it too becomes a part of the poem's connotative situation. It is significant that a female beloved described in very sensual terms has interrupted Ibn 'Arabi's moment of communication with the divine, seizing his attention. Considering that in Ibn 'Arabi's vision God interacts with the cosmos through all media in a complexity of interrelations, this dialogue, like all dialogues, occurs between the gnostic and the Real on a certain level. Moreover, the central theme of the poem, perplexity, is realized in the unexpected and brazen challenge of a beautiful woman. The profane and sacred elements of Ibn 'Arabi's account and poem cannot be distinguished; one enhances the other.

The commentary too offers its own perspective on the poem's themes of separation and perplexity. Ibn 'Arabi's discussion of the line questioning the beloved's safe arrival ("Do you suppose they made it safely?") brings to light the necessity of separation for existence, both the existence of an idealized beloved in the mind of the lover and the existence of all things in the will of God. Reflecting on this hemistich, Muhyi al-Din comments that "the Highest Panaromas, with respect to their being panoramas, have no existence except insofar as they have one to view them."<sup>57</sup> His statement points to the centrality of witnessing to existence. The Real looks upon potentialities among the Immutable Identities in order for those identities to be granted existence; if he were to cease his gaze, they would cease to exist. On the receptive side, the extent to which all of creation witnesses the Real determines its receptivity and thus its existence. By drawing a comparison between this cosmological phenomenon and the lover's apprehension about his beloved and her caravan, Ibn 'Arabi comments on the role of imagination in existence. One moment, the lover visualizes his beloved's safe arrival, so she exists. The next moment, he visualizes her

perdition; thus she ceases to exist. Her well-being, in fact, her very being, has become a function of his imagination. This parallels the Real's maintenance of creation merely through his gazing or active knowledge. Again, the created order becomes imitated and realized in the relationship between human lovers and human beloveds. One also sees from this observation that the separated beloved is a *more* intrinsic part of the lover than the present beloved. Separation itself has become an important factor in her continued idealized existence—she can now exist perfectly and eternally in his heart, a theme already seen.

According to the commentary, this poem also represents the relationship between the Muhammadan Heart, conducive to all forms, and the Highest Panoramas, the end point of all witnessing. Such a heart can reach such heights of selfless absorption in gazing that it almost ceases to exist. Yet without the gazer, that which is “seen” also becomes nonexistent. Thus, like an intense light that causes temporary blindness, the seer and the seen flash in and out of existence in flickers of intensity. (This corresponds to the poem's description of the caravan, safe one instant, annihilated another instant.) The Muhammadan Heart functions so because of its ethereal nature, standing close to nothingness, unblemished by “being bound by stations,” a perfect mirror of selflessness and reflexivity that assumes all forms.<sup>58</sup> No stations separate that heart from the Highest Panoramas, so its view is the most proximate possible; hence the fervor described.

Ibn 'Arabi's commentary on the final double line reaffirms the passage quoted above from *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyah*, asserting that the demands and desires brought by love cause the lover to face contradictories (*al-naqidayn*). Again, the lover's desire for union can contradict the beloved's will, and the beloved's will can contradict the dictates of love. Here Ibn 'Arabi makes explicit the connection between these contradictories and the perplexity (*hayrah*) that besets the lover. This accurate description of the effects of love should not be considered exclusive to the gnostics. In fact, perplexity as a characteristic shared by gnostic and nongnostic love bestows this poem with sacred and profane veracity simultaneously. In this passage Ibn 'Arabi also outlines the ascending stages of love, from capricious love (*hawa*), to pure love (*hubb*), to firm love (*wadd*), and lastly to passionate love (*'ishq*).

In another poem, Ibn 'Arabi focuses—in the first fifteen double lines—on the pain of separation. The persona, accompanied by two companions, weeps at the abandoned encampments, and only tears and the poetic tales of famous lovers in the Arabic tradition bring him comfort. An important contradiction arises; the lover enkindles and furthers his pain by remembering the beloved, and yet the mention of the beloved also somehow brings him relief. The final ten double lines of this poem (beginning “Long has been my yearning . . .”), which are my focus, more directly involve the theme of contradiction. The details Ibn 'Arabi reveals there, moreover, leave no doubt that the poet specifies Nizam as his human beloved. Nevertheless, the

poem as a whole best displays the main theme of overpowering love, one that tortures the lover, yet one he seeks out actively:

My malady comes from one with malady in her eyelids,  
 Distract me by mentioning her! Distract me!  
 Suddenly flapping wings, the ashen birds in grasslands cry—  
 the grief of these pigeons comes from what has grieved me.  
 My father be the ransom for a tender one, playful, from the girls  
 draped in litters, who saunters among satisfied women.  
 She rose out in the open like the sun, and when then  
 she set, she radiated in the hidden horizon of my heart.  
 Oh desert ruins at Ramah, near completely vanished!  
 How many girls they saw with just-blossomed breasts and beauty!  
 My father, then myself, be ransomed for a young, nourished gazelle,  
 who pastures within my ribcage in invulnerability;  
 the fires therein do not hurt it—for it is light.  
 In such a manner is light an extinguisher of fires.  
 My two companions! Bind up my bridle-strings,  
 for I must see the trace of her abode with my eyesight!  
 Hence, once you have reached the abode, there dismount  
 and at that place, my two fellow travelers, weep for me.  
 Linger, for a little while, with me at those ruins.  
 We will try to weep. No, I will weep for what has undone me.  
 Love-longing it is who shoots me without arrows;  
 Love-longing it is who kills me without spear.  
 Tell me, when I am weeping on her account,  
 will you help me in tear-shedding, will you help me?  
 And recount for me the tale of Hind and of Lubna  
 and Sulayma, Zaynab, and of 'Inan.  
 Then add to it accounts of Hajir and Zarud,  
 reporting on the pastures in which graze the gazelles.  
 Moan because of me with the poetry of Qays and Layla,  
 and Mayya and the trouble-stricken Ghaylan.  
 Long has been my yearning for that young one versed in prose  
 and in verse, with her own pulpit, and with clarity of expression,  
 from the daughters of kings from the land of Persia,  
 from the most glorious of cities: from Isfahan.  
 She is the daughter of 'Iraq, the daughter of my imam;<sup>59</sup>  
 I am her contrasting opposite: a Yemeni son.  
 Have you ever seen, oh my masters, or ever heard

of two contrasting opposites undergoing combination?  
 If you could only see us in Ramah offering back and forth  
 winecups of love-longing without the use of fingers,  
 when love-longing between us drives to further chatter,  
 sweet and heart-arousing, but without the use of tongue,  
 then you would see that in which reason becomes lost,  
 Yemen and 'Iraq, pressed close together embracing.  
 He spoke a lie, the poet who had said prior to my age,  
 hurling at me the rocks of his faculty of reason,  
 "Oh you who seek to wed Canopus to the Pleiades,  
 may God grant you life, how will these two ever meet?"<sup>60</sup>  
 They, the Pleiades, are northerly when they rise toward Syria,  
 and Canopus, when he rises, is southerly toward Yemen."<sup>61</sup>

The contrast between these two lovers, one Arab the other Persian, one male the other female, represents a vital contrast and even contradiction in existence itself: similitude and transcendence. This becomes apparent in Ibn 'Arabi's discussion of the manner in which these lovers offer cups of wine without fingers and speak without tongues. Such imagery refers to the actions that lovers take even when inactive; in the realm of imagination, lovers share the intoxicating wine of love merely through glancing, speak even when silent, and embrace even when distant. According to Ibn 'Arabi, this reference to "without the use of fingers" signifies "transcendence [*tanzih*], sanctification [*taqdis*] and a cautioning that this is a supersensory, hidden matter, removed from the sensory [*al-hiss*], the imaginal [*al-khayal*], form [*al-surah*], and representation [*mithal*]."<sup>62</sup> That is, there is a transcendence of love, beyond the realm of action, one that knows or needs no means to become actualized, and yet is very real. Ibn 'Arabi here compares these ungraspable and ethereal interactions of lovers to the incomparable qualities of his true Beloved, reminding us that the gnostic even loves distance and transcendence, insofar as it is the will of his Beloved. The human beloved represents not only distance but also cruelty, a point revealed in Ibn 'Arabi's commentary on his description of Nizam as "the daughter of 'Iraq." According to Ibn 'Arabi, the beloved is associated with 'Iraq because of "the harshness [*al-jafa*'], severity [*al-shiddah*], and unbelief [*al-kufr*] that can be attributed to 'Iraq."<sup>63</sup> One must bear in mind that the *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq* surrounds itself with the imagery of the Hajj, so that Ibn 'Arabi's association of these attributes of constraint with 'Iraq almost definitely derives from the prayer a pilgrim makes at one of the four corners of the Ka'bah, namely, the 'Iraqi Corner (*al-rukn al-'Iraqi*).<sup>64</sup> In chapter 72 of *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyah*, Ibn 'Arabi relates the corners of the Ka'bah to the various bestirrings (*khawatir*) that enter the heart, attributing undesirable Satanic bestirrings to the 'Iraqi Corner: "We made the Satanic bestirring pertain



to the 'Iraqi Corner only because the Lawgiver has decreed that at that location be said: 'I seek refuge in God from discord [*shiqaq*], hypocrisy [*nifaq*], and evil character traits [*su' al-akhlaq*].' One can know the various grades of these corners through the formulaic remembrances decreed for them."<sup>65</sup>

Conversely, Ibn 'Arabi associates with Yemen the attributes of faith (*al-iman*), wisdom (*al-hikmah*), the Breath of the All Merciful (*al-nafas al-rahmani*, which in a famous tradition is associated with Yemen),<sup>66</sup> and tenderness of heart (*riqqat al-af'idah*). The dynamic he creates allows him to relate feminine receptive qualities to the lover (himself) and masculine qualities of dominance to the beloved (Nizam). This brings spiritual significance to a frequent phenomenon in love lyrics: the cruelty of the beloved. Ibn 'Arabi makes this point clear: "She is a beloved, so she has the traits of harsh estrangement [*al-jafa'*], distance [*al-bu'd*], roughness [*al-ghilzah*], and subjugation [*al-qahr*]. I am the lover, so I have the traits of helpfulness [*al-nusrah*], faith [*al-iman*], tenderness [*al-riqqah*], and gracefulness [*al-latafah*], beseechingly seeking the beloved's satisfaction and finding sweetness in that."<sup>67</sup> In other words, the polarity of God's majestic-versus-beautiful attributes presents itself not only in the male-female dichotomy, but also in the hardheartedness of the beloved and the frustrations of the delicate lover. Moreover, such attributes appear geographically as well; as has been seen, there is a complexity of association, geographic and otherwise, that occurs in the poetry and commentary of Ibn 'Arabi, one that, according to him, reflects the complex interactions that occur in the levels of existence.

Lastly, there is the matter of the faculty of reason (*al-'aql*), which has no access to contradictions and hence has no access to matters of love. As Ibn 'Arabi mentions, when these two lovers unite, they bring together contradictories. The female beloved, representing dominance (*al-qahr*), unites with the male lover, representing kindness (*al-lutf*). Love unites one who is cruel and seeks distance with one who is kind and seeks proximity; this represents the divine dilemma itself. God is, according to Ibn 'Arabi and other mystics, known as one who combines opposites.<sup>68</sup> Not only does he possess attributes of dominance and kindness, or glory and mercy, but he is also described by the verse quoted in Ibn 'Arabi's commentary: *he is the First and the Last, the Outer and the Inner* (57:3). The faculty of reason, in explaining this verse, would use its discerning powers to conclude that "he is First in this respect, Last in this other respect, Outer in this respect, and Inner according to something else," when this is not the case at all.<sup>69</sup> Reason, just like every faculty, is limited by that for which it has been created to perceive. Just as one cannot smell sights or hear smells, so too is the faculty of reason limited by the boundaries of logic. The esoteric faculty, the lordly inner heart (*al-sirr al-rabbani*) witnesses God's combining these opposites, so that the gnostic towers above a mere transcendent understanding of God through his acknowledgment and direct experience of contradictories. The gnostic sees the unseen, loves the transcendent, discovers the unbounded in forms,

and, perhaps most significant here, realizes that he is both identical to and infinitely distant from the Real. Herein lies an important observation that relates human love to mysticism. The lover (even in the most profane sense of love) not only succumbs to accepting contradictories, he considers them to be a part of his existence; he lives and experiences contradictions. In this manner, the lover resembles the gnostic, and the gnostic brings to completion the spiritual dimensions of the lover as one who encounters and embodies contradictories. Although reason can never comprehend it, love itself stands as the kernel and reality of all existence, one that forces such contradictories together.

### **The Real's Needlessness as the Beloved's Cruel Indifference**

As has been seen, one important element in the contradictions faced by the lover is the cruelty of the beloved. The lover must accept the beloved's desire for separation and, more commonly in the poetry of 'Iraqi, the beloved's indifference. It is possible that the indifference seen in the poetry of 'Iraqi in some ways stems from his emphasis on beloveds who are beardless young men. Perhaps this boy beloved—uninterested in sexual relationships, homoerotic or otherwise—captures a sense of earnest and unbreakable indifference and thus was considered a fitting model for poetic love. Nevertheless, the beloved as a representation of the cosmic force of constraint and subjugation reveals much about the experiences of gnostic lovers. Cruelty as a divine attribute is explained in some detail by 'Iraqi's predecessor, Ahmad Ghazali: "Since there has been a conjunction [of hearts] in witnessing, the love of the lover necessitates helplessness, baseness, suffering, abjectness, and submission in all forms of his behavior, while the love of the beloved necessitates tyranny, pride, and glory: 'Because of our heart-render's loveliness and beauty / We are not suitable for him, but he suits us.'" <sup>70</sup> Ghazali interprets the relationship between lover and beloved, one of dominion and abjectness, as a result of the polarity of attributes in a complementary relationship. The lover's share is complete passivity and helplessness, while the beloved's share is activity and tyranny; these polarities exist within a whole and comprehensive phenomenon that is love itself. The cruel beloved, then, has a theoretical role in Ghazali's (and 'Iraqi's) cosmological vision of love that demands representation in the confines of verse.

The indifference of the beloved toward his lascivious admirer provides a fitting scene for the power imbalance Ghazali describes, as can be seen in the poetry of 'Iraqi:

Many are the pains I've endured, what a shame!  
 My desires not fulfilled, not at all, what a shame!  
 In this world every door that I saw, I opened,  
 but no heart-holder's face I ever saw, what a shame!  
 I became despondent, for before this hopeful eye

no fair-cheeked beauty ever came, what a shame!  
 Never did I see in this world a rose-garden  
 that didn't scrape my eye with a thorn, what a shame!  
 A beloved have I who does not recollect me:  
 Who else has such a beloved, [so aloof]? What a shame!  
 He observes my sickly heart, but never does he ask,  
 "What ever happened to that one who was infirm?" What a shame!  
 One-hundred times I've been to the threshold of his intimacy—  
 not once did he acquiesce to grant me audience, what a shame!  
 To this heart of mine from lamenting for his distance  
 arrives a [different] sorrow every moment, what a shame!  
 Without your face, my days have now expired;  
 not much more is remaining of this life—what a shame!  
 Of 'Iraqi he doesn't inquire, until ['Iraqi] dies.  
 Thereupon says the World, "He's died. Yes, what a shame!"<sup>71</sup>

The *radif* of "what a shame" (*darigha*) repeated throughout the poem serves as a cry of lamentation for a beloved who simply does not care. In the final hemistich of the poem, "what a shame" might mean something slightly different; it is perhaps an ironic expression of modest grief for an 'Iraqi who has died unfulfilled. Once dead, 'Iraqi arouses nothing more than a blunt statement that "he's died" (*murd*), followed by a short pronouncement of regret. Still, whether genuinely or nonchalantly, it is the world and not the beloved who mourns, so that the beloved's indifference toward 'Iraqi ends not even with his lifespan. There is nothing blatantly or even subtly mystical about this poem, and yet there is also nothing to suggest that it lacks sacred meaning. This is actually quite an important trait in love lyrics that can function simultaneously in sacred and profane contexts: they testify to the beloved's cruelty and indifference in a sincere manner, usually devoid of conspicuous mystical language:

Each day before dawn's hour, I implore and grieve to the East Wind,  
 so that from me a message right to your neighborhood it brings.  
 I tread wind in futility and have given a lifetime to the wind,  
 how else could East Wind find its way to the dust before your door?  
 Since I have no one as confidant, with the wind I hold my discourse,  
 since [for this pain] I find no ointment, I ask the wind to cure me.  
 The fire of the heart by eye-water will not wane, so  
 I blow a wind on fire so it might consume me all the better.  
 And maybe I will turn to ash, brought high upon a wind,  
 liberated from this narrow suffering-place of tribulation.  
 Dying and becoming ash outranks this life I have with you;

much more pleasing is combustion than estrangement from your face.  
 Life without your face has absolutely no tranquility;  
 life without your face is either death or weariness.<sup>72</sup>

The matter of indifference and estrangement is shared by all lovers, even if it acquires cosmological significance only for the mystics. Estrangement results from the great need and attachment that the lover feels for the beloved. The beloved, then, is seen as needless in relation to the lover, even the profane lover. As 'Iraqi states, "Needlessness is an attribute of the beloved and poverty an attribute of the lover."<sup>73</sup> Yet when the beloved is the Supremely Needless (*al-ghani*), one can imagine the annihilating sense of estrangement experienced, as it is by the gnostic lover. The sentiment becomes magnified when one faces a divine beloved who is not indifferent on account of caprice or whim but rather is Needless (and perceived as indifferent) by his eternal essence. The mystical ramifications of the needless beloved are alluded to in the *Istilahat-i Sufiyah* attributed to 'Iraqi, where, for example, the author defines harsh estrangement (*jafa*) as "what they call the covering of the wayfarer's heart from gnostic realizations [*ma'arif*] and from witnessings [*mushahadat*]."<sup>74</sup> Just as the incognizant lover senses that he needs physical union, the gnostic lover senses that he needs spiritual proximity and witnessing, and suffers when the beloved denies him such.

One must bear in mind that, without the beloved's seeming indifference and demand for separation, the lover would have no need to lament or, for example, sing out in poetry. The spiritual wisdom in the divine beloved's decree of separation becomes apparent in the *Istilahat-i Sufiyah's* definition of "the lover's groan" (*nalah*) as "whispered prayers" (*munajat*).<sup>75</sup> With separation, the soul cries out, searches, and discovers its own intrinsic poverty. This decree is not a matter of indifference, even if the lover's frustrated pleas depict it as such; rather, separation is divinely ordained and an essential part of the path to self-perfection. 'Iraqi clarifies this matter most explicitly in chapter 22 of the *Lama'at*, where to some extent he repeats the observations made by Ibn 'Arabi, but adds one important point: "A requirement for the lover is to love that which the beloved loves, even if it be constant distance and separation. Usually, moreover, the beloved desires the separation and distance of the lover. This is the case, so that the lover will seek refuge from the beloved's harsh estrangement in desirous love."<sup>76</sup>

This important addition to Ibn 'Arabi's observation tells us that desirous love (*'ishq*), and not the beloved, should be the lover's goal. In desirous love, the lover loses himself and becomes a pauper, and ultimately "the pauper relinquishes existence and tolerates his own nonexistence."<sup>77</sup> 'Iraqi tells us that estrangement is more beneficial for the lover than union because "in proximity and union, the lover retains the attribute of his own will, while in distance and separation he takes on the attribute of the beloved's will."<sup>78</sup> Love effaces the self and (as the true motivating

actor behind both lover and beloved) owns the power of abasement that the lover initially attributes to the beloved. As 'Iraqi observes, the "lover suffers abasement because of desirous love, not because of the beloved."<sup>79</sup> Just as love has endowed the beloved with attributes of harshness and dominance, it is love that has endowed the lover with attributes of mildness and abasement.

This abasement and relinquishment of will is, of course, not merely an effect of love, but is also the end of the spiritual wayfarer's path more generally. Thus one should not be surprised that gnostics, who were often unwilling to revere the uninitiated, would admire true lovers, even those who loved benightedly. After all, such lovers lost their very selves in pursuing the unattained and became subject to the destructive demands and contradictions of love.

### Poetry: A Medium Receptive to Imagination's Forms

One final factor that renders poetry suitable to express the gnostic's visionary experience is one mentioned by Muhyi al-Din himself: its ability to evoke forms. Imagination, vision in forms, and poetry are bound together in an astrological sense in the writings of Ibn 'Arabi. According to Ibn 'Arabi's understanding of astrology, the third celestial sphere bears three important characteristics which relate directly to poetic composition: it is the sphere of the prophet Joseph, it is the sphere of the divine name "the Form-giver" (*al-musawwir*), and it is the sphere of Venus.<sup>80</sup> At this sphere the gnostic encounters the sciences particular to the prophet Joseph, those "related to representational forms and forms of the imagination."<sup>81</sup> It should be no surprise, since this sphere projects from the divine name "the Form-giver," that it includes that which pertains to forms and the form-giving abilities of the human soul. It should also be no surprise that this is the sphere of the prophet Joseph, who is known to have been a master dream interpreter; as Ibn 'Arabi mentions, since a dreamer encounters the supersensory in imaginal forms, the dream interpreter must revert such images to the meanings which they represent. He must recognize, to use a common example, milk as the form of knowledge. This is the process of interpretation or *al-ta'bir* (literally, "crossing over"), a method by which one returns from form to meaning. The opposite of this, the process of capturing meaning in form, is not unique to the mystics, who capture meaning in form through the process of witnessing. Rather, Ibn 'Arabi recognizes a number of phenomena, generally experienced in the human world, that bring meaning into the limits of form: "This is the celestial sphere of complete form-giving and harmonious arrangement [*nizam*]. From this sphere is derived assistance for poets. From it also arrive arrangement, proper fashioning, and geometrical forms within corporeal bodies. . . . From this sphere is known the meaning of proper fashioning, correct making, the beauty whose existence comprises wisdom, and the beauty that is desired by and is agreeable to a specific human constitution."<sup>82</sup>

Two important observations must be made here. First, this sphere provides assistance to those able to envision meaning in the forms of words and create thereby forms that evoke meaningful forms in the imaginations of others: the poets. Moreover, Ibn 'Arabi associates this sphere not only with poets but also with poetry itself as versified speech; in using the word *nizam* (which means "harmonious arrangement" and is thus cognate with the word for "verse," *nazm*), Ibn 'Arabi points to poetry as metered and rhymed language. Poetry gives artful form to meaning and constantly reminds its audience of the beauty of its form. Ibn 'Arabi assigns other modes of language—writing and speech—to the second sphere, that which pertains to knowledge. This is because in relaying knowledge, writers and speakers aim for clarity of expression; the Prophet Muhammad too was sent to clarify (*mubayyinān*) and present in detail (*mufasssilān*), so that he was divinely withheld from composing poetry. Poetry, after all, is not about breaking knowledge down for clear understanding but about capturing it into an evocative image or form; in the words of Ibn 'Arabi, "poetry [*al-shi'r*] comes from perceptiveness [*al-shu'ur*], so that its locus is summation, rather than breaking [meaning] apart in explication [*al-ijmal la al-tafsil*]." <sup>83</sup>

One might say, then, that while other modes of speech must answer to reason, poetry is born from imagination and bears its traits. While other modes of speech unravel meaning, poetry localizes it.<sup>84</sup> Second, the third sphere, the sphere of poets, is also the sphere of human beauty (*al-husn*), which relates not only to Joseph, renowned for his miraculous physical beauty, but also to harmonious forms, that is, forms that suit the meanings they embody. In discussing this sphere, Ibn 'Arabi outlines a general pattern in existence. God as the form giver has brought meaning into form. These forms are considered beautiful because they allow an encounter with meaning in a manner that accords with the limits of that perceiver. Every perceiver also has the ability to create forms within his imagination, using the human form-giving faculty. The poet's role therefore is one both receptive and active. The poet receives meaning in forms within his imagination. He then creates forms, through words, forms that are able to stimulate forms within the imagination of his audience. Of course, what the gnostic *receives* from poetry is emphatically more profound than what others receive. Moreover, the poet that produces such forms need not be a gnostic. Since stimuli provoke various forms in the imaginations of various perceivers, form-giving poetry, whether by a gnostic or not, will arouse spiritually meaningful forms in the imagination of the gnostic perceiver.

Such intimations are fascinating, in part because of the extent to which they parallel statements made by the great Islamic peripatetic philosopher Abu 'Ali al-Husayn ibn Sina (d. 428/1037), known in the Latinate version of his name as "Avicenna." According to Salim Kemal, Ibn Sina posits a link between imagination and poetry: "Avicenna defines poetry as imaginative speech, pointing to an etymological

relation between 'imagination' and 'imaginative representations' to explain the nature of poetic discourse. He explains that imagination is the ability to reproduce sensory experiences as mental images, even in the absence of the objects which caused these experiences. The imagination is able to combine these images and part of images in forms that differ from the original experience. This activity is crucial to human thought and present in thinking, imagining, calculating, dreaming, remembering, wishing, and so on.<sup>85</sup> Ibn 'Arabi's concern extends beyond the boundaries of the mental faculty of imagination shared by all human beings. One must bear in mind that the cosmos parallels the human soul in Ibn 'Arabi's cosmology, so that, just as the human being has an imagination, the cosmos has an imagination—or an imaginal realm (*'alam al-khayal*). Encounters that occur here are no less real than that which occurs in the sensory realm, but they are not subject to every limitation of physical matter. Both the subjective and objective imaginations are conducive to forms and unrestrained by the boundaries of logic.

It is, in fact, imagination that makes contradictories accessible and perceivable, as noted by a contemporary scholar, Khalid Bilqasim.<sup>86</sup> In discussing imagination's relationship to composition in the thought of Ibn 'Arabi, Bilqasim makes use of chapter 177 of *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyah*, in which Ibn 'Arabi discusses gnosis of the station of gnosis, including the manner in which gnosis of imagination (both subjective and objective) aids in gnosis of gnosis. Imagination can make the impossible manifest in forms, allow vision of one object in two places simultaneously, and grant the reception of an object in its state of transformation and fluctuation, among other things.<sup>87</sup> Sensory meets supersensory, which we have seen so often in Ibn 'Arabi's discussions of beauty; this meeting of sensory and supersensory within imagination allows for the sacred-profane ambiguity in his poetry. This meeting allows the gnostic to experience two things at once: first, the love acquired by means of the sensory realm, and second, the limitlessness of the supersensory. So too does amorous poetry celebrate the sensual, but—in evoking forms suited to the unimpaired and nearly flawless realm of imagination—intimates something more ideal than pure physicality.

Much like poetic images, imaginal forms, freely changing and enamoring, become the medium of the gnostic's vision of love; they show him what he seeks, but in a limited fashion, arousing in him an uncontrollable desire for the limitless. Love poetry is thus the most fitting medium to convey the gnostic's amorous conflict with the *shahid*:

Peace be upon Salma and whoever settles in that private pasture,  
and it is the duty of one like me, so tender-hearted, to give greetings.  
And what would she lose if she were to return these salutations  
to us? But one cannot pass judgment against beautiful idols.

They set off, when the tenebrousness of night let down its curtains,  
 and I said to her, "Uncontrollably in love! Stranded! Enslaved by love!  
 Yearnings surrounding him jealously! Ready to unleash  
 upon him are racing arrows, no matter where he turns."  
 She smiled revealing her teeth. A flash of lightning struck.  
 I do not know which of the two broke the sheer night darkness.  
 She said, "Doesn't it suffice him, concerning me, that with his heart  
 he witnesses me in every single moment? Doesn't it? Doesn't it?"<sup>88</sup>

Of course, the irony in the final double line is that the vision of the beloved that remains in the heart, despite its permanence, does *not* suffice. This is the paradox of a beloved who perseveres in the imagination; while she is ubiquitous, it is that very ubiquity that tortures the lover, for she is never attained. In this very manner, for the gnostic, love for the *shahid* that remains in the heart from unveiling is an agonizing pleasure. Ibn 'Arabi's commentary describes this experience as witnessing the divine self-disclosures in ever-changing moments through the beautiful forms of the imaginal realm; wherever the gnostic lover turns, *there is the face of God* (2:115).<sup>89</sup> While the gnostic's experience is unfathomable for the uninitiated, the gnostic is still human and undergoes that experience through the faculties common to all humans. Only imagination, a human faculty employed by all who hear or write poetry, can bring the contradictions of witnessing, the allures of beauty, and the images of love together. Therefore not only lovers in the world of human affairs but also lovers of spiritual realities found the artistic medium of poetic expression most suited for the ordeal of love.



172. Shamisa, *Shahidbazi*, 124.
173. Cited and translated by Clifford Edmund Bosworth, *The Mediaeval Islamic Underworld: The Banu Sasan in Arabic Society and Literature* Part One (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), 115.
174. Hafiz, *Diwan-i Hafiz*, ed. Parwiz Natil Khanluri (Tehran: Khwarazmi, 1362 hijri-shamsi), vol. 1, p. 230, #108.
175. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 110, #47.
176. *Kulliyat-i Sa'di*, ed. Muhammad 'Ali Furughi (Tehran: Nashr-i Tulu', 2003), *tayyibat*, 641.
177. *Talbis Iblis*, 303.

### Chapter 6: The Amorous Lyric as Mystical Language

1. In Gerhard Böwering's words, "Exegesis evolved into eisegesis." See "The Light Verse: Qu'ranic Text and Sufi Interpretation," *Oriens* 36 (2001): 113–44, here 144.

2. Jaroslav Stetkevych, *The Zephyrs of Najd: the Poetics of Nostalgia in the Classical Arabic Nasib* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 79–92, 100–102. For an excellent example of Michael Sells work in this regard, see "At the Way Stations, Stay' Ibn 'Arabi's Poem 18 (Qif bi l-Manazil) from the *Translation of Desires*," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 18 (1995), 57–65.

3. As William Chittick suggests, "Without a detailed analysis of the Shaykh's concepts and worldview, it is impossible to grasp the world of meanings behind his literary forms." See William C. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-'Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 67.

4. *Dhakha'ir*, 4.

5. Stetkevych, *Zephyrs of Najd*, 92.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., 99.

8. Ibid.

9. Michael A. Sells presents Ibn 'Arabi's commentary from an informed and textually sensitive position: "Ibn 'Arabi's commentary on his love poem is not an artificial imposition of intellectualized allegory. The connections between the actual language of the poem and the expansions in the commentary are robust, and the terminological affinities between the poem and Ibn 'Arabi's philosophy are precise . . . To ask who she is, human or deity, would violate *adab*. It would be an indelicate question. The beloved, immanent within the heart-secret (*sirr*) of the poet and the Sufi, is also transcendent, beyond all delimitation, beyond any single static image." Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, 111.

10. A reference to the Qur'an, 81:18.

11. *Where is the escape* alludes to the Qur'an, 75:10.

12. *Dhakha'ir*, 225–30; *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*, 168–70. I have based my translation mostly on the text of the poems found in the commentary (*Dhakha'ir*), since the

commentary will occupy a prominent place in my discussion. Still, I also will cite the Dar Sadir edition of *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*, for ease of reference. Some of the inconsistencies in the text of this poem concerning place-names have been best resolved by Nicholson, *Mystical Odes*, 39–40 (#46). I have also favored Nicholson's reading of *magh-nan* instead of *ma'nan*, in the twenty-third hemistich, because it seems to follow more closely the tone and sense of the rest of the poem.

13. It is not uncommon for Ibn 'Arabi to refer to Nizam's name through allusions. In *al-Futuhat*, Ibn 'Arabi comments that "like the name of Allah in elucidation and verification / my beloved's name is based upon the form of the source." The name Allah, if taken to be derived from *al-ilah*, has the same lexical pattern or *wazn* as al-Nizam. See *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 178, p. 320.25 (p. 324). Also see a less indirect allusion in *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 178, p. 321.33 (p. 326) or *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 178, p. 316.9 (p. 320). Three other instances, all from *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*, are cited in Nicholson's introduction to *Mystical Odes*, 8.

14. *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*, 9.

15. Stetkevych, *Zephyrs of Najd*, 97.

16. See 68:42.

17. See Ibn 'Arabi, *Kitab al-Jalal wa-l-Jamal* from *Rasa'il Ibn al-'Arabi* (Hyderabad-Deccan: Da'irat al-Ma'arif al-'Uthmaniyah, 1948), 3–4.

18. *Dhakha'ir*, 229. Muslim records that the Prophet responds to Anas ibn Malik's inquiry, asking him why he exposes himself to being hit by the falling rain, "Because it is recent from its Lord (*hadithu 'ahdin bi-rabbihi*), may he be exalted." See *Sahih Muslim*, *Kitab Salat al-Istisqa'* (9/2), #898, 446. This hadith is also mentioned (and related to the beauty of the young—the child Moses in one instance, beardless youths in the latter) in *Fusus al-Hikam*, 198, and alluded to in *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 108, p. 186.24 (p. 190).

19. *Dhakha'ir*, 230.

20. *Ibid.*, 229–30. For reference to the hadith, see chapter 2, note 16.

21. One often finds that, depending on context and function, a cosmological reality can be indicated by various names in the writing of Ibn 'Arabi.

22. *Dhakha'ir*, 5. This passage is also discussed in Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 78.

23. Baldick, "Poems of Fakhr al-Din 'Iraqi," 8.

24. *Ibid.*, 8–9.

25. Baldick refers his readers to *The Mystical Philosophy of Muhyid Din-Ibnul 'Arabi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939). See Baldick, "Poems of Fakhr al-Din 'Iraqi," 9.

26. Hamid ibn Fadlullah Jamali (d. 942/1536) asserts such in his *Siyar al-'Arifin*, a hagiographical account of Chishti and Indian Suhrawardi saints. In this text, Jamali presents an account of his meeting with Jami in which they disagree about the matter, Jamali proposing 'Arif and Jami proposing al-Qunawi, until Jami supposedly has a dream verifying Jamali's stance. See Baldick, "Poems of Fakhr al-Din 'Iraqi," 92.

27. *Ibid.*, 154.

28. *Kulliyat*, 137; *Diwan*, 94.

29. *Kulliyat*, 184; *Diwan*, 116–17.

30. Baldick, "Poems of Fakhr al-Din 'Iraqi," 199.

31. *Kulliyat*, 248; *Diwan*, 116.

32. For example, the author of 'Iraqi's glossary defines *zuhd* (which literally means "asceticism") as "what they call turning away from the world (*dunya*) and that which is in it." Tabrizi's definition is similar: "turning away from excess and worldly luxuries." Nafisi's edition of 'Iraqi's *Diwan* relays a definition almost identical to Tabrizi's, adding the phrase "but only when the soul has some yearning for it." While this is an accurate description of *zuhd* as a desired ethical trait, it does not strive to capture the nuanced meaning of *zuhd* in 'Iraqi's poetry, which very often conveys the negative sense of ostentatious and hollow worship. *Kulliyat*, 565; *Diwan*, 428; *Rashf al-Alhaz*, 69.

33. *Rashf al-Alhaz*, 33–34.

34. *Ibid.*, 34–35.

35. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Kitab al-Isti'dhan* (79/1), #6227, 1554; and *Sahih Muslim*, *Kitab al-Birr* (45/32), #2612, 1408 and *Kitab al-Jannah* (51/11), #2841, 1523.

36. *Rashf al-Alhaz*, 37. The phrase *A-last*, literally "Am-I-Not," refers to the Qur'an, 7:172, which is interpreted as mentioning a pre-eternal covenant in which God asks the yet unborn children of Adam to affirm that he is their Lord.

37. *Majmu'ah-i Athar-i Shaykh Mahmud Shabistari*, ed. Samad Muwahhid (Tehran: Kitabkhanah-i Tahuri, 1365/1986). The *Gulshan-i Raz* occurs on 67–108; here see p. 97, double lines 725–76. Hirawi also discusses these lines in his introduction to Tabrizi's *Rashf al-Alhaz*, 21–22.

38. *Kulliyat*, 556; *Diwan*, 425; *Rashf al-Alhaz*, 43.

39. *Kulliyat*, 556; *Diwan*, 424; *Rashf al-Alhaz*, 43.

40. *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*, 40–44. See also the next note.

41. A summary of Ibn 'Arabi's statements in *FM*, vol. 4, ch. 558, pp. 259–61 (pp. 259–61), translated by Beneito, "Servant of the Loving One," especially 10–13.

42. *Dhakha'ir*, 51. I have changed the name "Ibn al-Durayj" in the text to "[Qays] ibn al-Dharih." A misplacement of dots easily explains the error in this text.

43. *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 178, p. 322.11 (p. 326).

44. *Ibid.*

45. *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 108, p. 186.20 (p. 189).

46. *Diwan*, 255. This *tarji'band* is missing from Muhtasham's edition (the *Kulliyat*), although reference to Mahmud and Ayaz can be found in a separate *tarji'band* in *Kulliyat*, 228; *Diwan*, 260. For reference to these two male lovers, also see *Lama'at*, 67; *Kulliyat*, 471 (ch. 6).

47. Anwari, *Diwan-i Anwari*, ed. Muhammad Taqi Mudarris Radawi (Tehran: Bungalow-i Tarjuman wa Nashr-i Kitab, 1961), 2:769; *Lama'at*, 63; *Kulliyat*, 468 (ch. 5).

48. I refer to Hossein Mohyeddin Elahi Ghomshei, whose perspective is clearly, in many respects, influenced by Akbari thought; according to Ghomshei, the philosophical premise of his observations is that "the Being of the One precedes the being of the Many, that the existence of Unity precedes the existence of Multiplicity." See "Poetics

and Aesthetics in the Persian Sufi Literary Tradition,” *Sufi* 28 (Winter 1995–96): 21–27, here especially 21, which is based on a lecture by Ghomshei given on October 18, 1994, at the Temenos Academy of Integral Studies, London.

49. *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 178, 315.34 (p. 320).

50. Of course, contradictions and paradoxes play an important role in mystical language more generally, as commented on by Lynn Charles Bauman in “The Hermeneutics of Mystical Discourse” (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Arlington, 1990), 44.

51. *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 178, p. 315.21 (p. 320).

52. 57:3.

53. *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 178, p. 323.4 (p. 327).

54. *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 178, p. 322.3 (p. 326).

55. *Dhakha’ir*, 7; *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*, 11.

56. *Dhakha’ir*, 7–8 (for this entire narrative). It is interesting that this passage seems to describe actual physical contact (usually forbidden according to Islamic law), attested to by Ibn ‘Arabi’s description of this lady’s silk-like skin and the possibility that he is here wearing the two cloths of pilgrim sanctity (*ihram*), which might leave the area on the upper back exposed. Of course, one must bear in mind that this is possibly an imaginal event.

57. *Dhakha’ir*, 9.

58. *Ibid.*

59. Ibn ‘Arabi alludes to Nizam’s father, Abu Shuja’ Zahir ibn Rustam al-Isfahani (d. 609/1212), who instructed him.

60. Nicholson has located these two double lines (the four lines that here conclude Ibn ‘Arabi’s poem), which belong to ‘Umar ibn Abi Rabi’ah; see *Mystical Odes*, 87.

61. *Dhakha’ir*, 99–115; *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*, 78–86.

62. *Dhakha’ir*, 111.

63. *Ibid.*, 110.

64. These four corners are the Corner of the Black Stone in the East, the ‘Iraqi Corner in the North, the Shami Corner in the West, and the Yemeni Corner in the South.

65. *FM*, vol. 1, ch. 72, p. 796.27 (p. 666).

66. See, for example, chapter 15 of *al-Futuhāt*, which begins by citing this hadith, “Truly the Breath of the All-Merciful comes to me from the direction of Yemen,” referring to the Prophet’s distant companion Uways al-Qarani, who inhabited Yemen. See *FM*, vol. 1, ch. 15, p. 205.24 (p. 152).

67. *Dhakha’ir*, 110.

68. Ibn ‘Arabi mentions the Baghdadi Sufi, Abu Sa’id Ahmad ibn ‘Isa al-Kharraz (d. 286/899), as also proposing this description of God. See *Dhakha’ir*, 112.

69. *Dhakha’ir*, 112–13.

70. *Sawanih*, 171, ch. 20; in the translation, ch. 21. For the translation, see Pourjavady, *Sawanih*, 41.

71. *Kulliyat*, 127–28; *Diwan*, 90. There is a slight difference in wording between these two editions in the penultimate hemistich. Nafisi's *Diwan* makes more sense in this regard, so I have translated that version.

72. *Kulliyat*, 145; *Diwan*, 88–89. In this last hemistich, Nafisi's *Diwan* has a *ba* instead of *ya* before the last word, so that it would read, "Life without your face equals death plus weariness." Nafisi's *Diwan* and alternate manuscripts recognized by Muhtasham have *qaymati* instead of *rahati* as the last word in the penultimate hemistich, so that it would read, "Life without your face has absolutely no value."

73. *Lama'at*, 110; *Kulliyat*, 511 (ch. 20).

74. *Kulliyat*, 557; *Diwan*, 424. Or to give another example, 'Iraqi defines the beloved's anger (*khashm*) as "what they call the manifestation of the attributes of dominance (*qahr*)." See *Kulliyat*, 557; *Diwan*, 425.

75. *Kulliyat*, 574; *Diwan*, 436.

76. *Lama'at*, 116; *Kulliyat*, 516.

77. *Lama'at*, 112; *Kulliyat*, 513 (ch. 20). Muhtasham's edition omits the word *wujud*.

78. *Lama'at*, 117; *Kulliyat*, 517 (ch. 22).

79. *Lama'at*, 110; *Kulliyat*, 511 (ch. 20).

80. Venus' relationship to poetry, which will not be discussed, can be seen in the planet's association with radiance, beauty, and hence the impetus for love. See *FM*, vol. 4, ch. 559, 431.6 (p. 433). For the divine name "the Form-giver" as relating to this sphere, see Titus Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology According to Ibn 'Arabi*, trans. Bulent Rauf (Abingdon, UK: Beshara, 1977), 41.

81. *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 168, p. 272.4 (p. 275). For a translation of a portion of this chapter that pertains to this discussion, see Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 80–81.

82. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 81; *FM* vol. 2, ch. 168, p. 272.9 (p. 275).

83. *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 168, p. 271.23 (p. 274). This is also discussed by Claude Addas, "L'œuvre poétique d'Ibn 'Arabi et sa réception," *Studia Islamica* 91 (2000): 23–38, here 35–36.

84. Ibn 'Arabi also discusses the matter of prose versus poetry in the poem mentioned above, beginning "Long has been my yearning for that young one versed in prose / and in verse, with her own pulpit, and with clarity of expression." In possessing both prose (*nathr*) and verse (*nizam*, another allusion to the beloved's name), the female beloved represents the Real's dual qualities of being unbounded in terms of his essence (*wujud al-mutlaq*) and being bound to his creation in the names that relate to creation (*wujud al-muqayyad*). The word for prose, *nathr*, relates to scattering, hence Ibn 'Arabi's association of the word to essential being, which is unbounded or pure. The word for verse, *nizam*, relates to ordering and organizing, hence its relationship to bounded existence. Yet since Ibn 'Arabi does not clarify which mode of being is represented by which mode of language, there is another possibility. Perhaps since poetry is unbounded by the restraints of reason, it represents unbounded being. See *Dhakha'ir*, 109.

85. Salim Kemal, *The Philosophical Poetics of Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroës: The Aristotelian Reception* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 83.

86. See *al-Kitabah wa-l-Tasawwuf 'ind Ibn 'Arabi* (al-Dar al-Bayda', Morocco: Dar Tubqal li-l-Nashr, 2004), 149. In the third section of this study, Bilqasim undertakes an informed and careful discussion of poetic composition according to Ibn 'Arabi, including the *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*. Especially pertinent here is his observation that Ibn 'Arabi's altering of pronouns for the beloved, making use of feminine-singular, masculine-singular, and feminine-plural third-person pronouns, indicates that he does not have in mind love merely for an individual human. See 170–74.

87. See *al-Kitabah wa-l-Tasawwuf 'ind Ibn 'Arabi*, 149–50; *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 177, p. 305.7 (p. 309).

88. *Dhakha'ir*, 24–28; *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*, 25–27.

89. *Dhakha'ir*, 26–27.

## Conclusions

1. *El islam cristianizado: Estudio del "Sufismo" a través de las obras de Abenarabi de Murcia*, 1st ed. (Madrid: Editorial Plutarco, 1931).

2. *Islam and the Divine Comedy*, trans. Harold Sunderland (Lahore: Qausain, 1977), 277.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Islam and the Divine Comedy*, 274.

5. *Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Iman* (1/80), #183, pp. 112–35.

6. Many verses illustrate this. One example: "God has promised believing men and women gardens beneath which flow rivers, [gardens] in which they will live eternally, and goodly abodes, in Gardens of Eden. And the satisfaction of God is greater—that is the mighty success" (9:72). See also examples where the end goal of a life lived morally is described as "the face of God," for example, 2:272, 13:22, 30:37, 76:9, 92:20, et al.

7. *FM*, vol. 2, ch. 289, p. 636.11 (p. 648).